United Nations A/HRC/30/NGO/54

General Assembly

Distr.: General
3 September 2015

English only

Human Rights Council
Thirtieth session
Agenda item 3
Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Written statement* submitted by the Global Network for Rights and Development (GNRD), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[30 August 2015]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

GE.15-14949(E)

Please recycle

Women's Rights

The Global Network for Rights and Development (GNRD) is an international human rights organisation committed to promoting and protecting human rights and development. In these times, when more people than ever recorded have fled their homes to seek refuge elsewhere, GNRD would like to draw attention to the important issue of women and girls living in danger and fear in refugee camps and other areas providing them with temporary shelter.

The world is going through a global humanitarian crisis. Worldwide displacement is at the highest level ever recorded, having risen to 59.5 million forcibly displaced persons at the end of 2014. Compared to 51.2 million the previous year, it is the highest increase ever seen in a single year[1]. According to UNHCR there are currently over four million registered Syrian refugees[2], and by the end of last year, Syria had become the world's top source country of refugees. On average, almost one out of every four refugees is Syrian, with 95 per cent located in surrounding countries[3]. Four out of five of those who have fled are women or children[4].

For women and girls, having fled from their homes because of violence and danger, becoming a refugee does not mean they are safe. They continue living in fear, often subject to violence and danger. Syrian women and girls report experiencing higher levels of harassment and exploitation as refugees than they did in their home country. Among reasons for this are that they are seen as strangers in their new communities, taking advantage of resources they are not entitled to, and also that people are aware of them being refugees, and therefore vulnerable. There is widespread impunity for perpetrators of crimes against refugee women. Many of the victims do not see going to the police as an option as they are rarely sympathetic and can even be perpetrators of the crimes. Furthermore, women and girls report being sexually harassed and exploited by persons charged with delivering humanitarian aid, and persons with economic and/or political power in the communities[5].

The fear of harassment and abuse has led many women and girls to stay at home in their house or tent, instead of going out. They report feeling isolated and imprisoned in their own homes. In this way their right to freedom of movement is being severely limited. Moreover, the fear of harassment and sexual abuse leads to many parents pulling their daughters out of school, which has obvious negative effects on the lives of those girls.

Despite many women and girls staying in their homes for the majority of their time, they are still not safe. There are multiple reports of women and adolescent girls experiencing increased domestic violence as refugees. One of the probable causes for this is when men are not able to work or provide for their families, therefore not fulfilling the typical "male role", they turn their frustration towards their wives and children. It is a very prevalent problem for female refugees. Unfortunately not much focus is given to the problem, as it is often seen as outside of the "traditional" aid mandate[6].

---

[1] http://www.unhcr.org/558193896.html
[2] http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php
[3] http://www.unhcr.org.uk/about-us/key-facts-and-figures.html
[4] http://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/page_wrappers/assets/syria/pdf/IRC_WomenInSyria_Report_WEB.pdf
[5] http://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/page_wrappers/assets/syria/pdf/IRC_WomenInSyria_Report_WEB.pdf
[6] http://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/page_wrappers/assets/syria/pdf/IRC_WomenInSyria_Report_WEB.pdf

Another consequence of the danger women face is that forced child marriage has become much more frequent among Syrian refugees. Among reasons for this are that families feel they cannot protect their daughters and fear them being attacked, or they resort to premature marriage of their daughters for financial reasons. In Jordan the proportion of registered marriages in the Syrian refugee community where the bride was under 18 rose from 12% in 2011 to 25% in 2013. This number has reportedly increased in other surrounding countries. Numbers also indicate that girls are being married to older males[7]. The fatal consequences of child marriage are many and well known; lack of education, higher risk of domestic violence, isolation, poor access to sexual and reproductive health, poverty, and the higher risk of dying in childbirth, are a few.

As women and children make up the majority of refugees, there also needs to be a strong focus on helping them and listening to their needs. Female refugees face a series of human rights violations when living in refugee camps. They live in constant fear which largely impacts their freedom of movement. They have little access to information, education, and health services, and young girls often experience being forced into marriage. When states fail to make these women and girls safe they are in violation of numerous CEDAW articles, general recommendation 19 regarding violence and harassment toward women, and general recommendations 30 and 31 regarding violence and discrimination towards female refugees. Furthermore, states disregard the principles of the Beijing Platform for Action, specifically the articles relating to women's health, female refugees, violence against women in vulnerable situations, and child marriage.

GNRD calls for:

- Governments and NGOs to have discussions with female refugees, and listen to what they see as the greatest challenges in their lives.
- Governments and NGOs to empower women and girl refugees by informing them on health and their rights and arrange social activities, thereby creating networks for women.
- Governments and NGOs to offer economic support and incentives for refugee families who do not marry off underage girls.
- Governments and NGOs to educate and inform parents and community leaders in refugee camps/areas on the dangers and consequences of early marriage.
- Governments and NGOs to offer free, accessible, and quality education for refugee girls.
- Governments to carry out an effective implementation of existing laws and legislation on early marriage and violence against women in refugee areas.

[7] http://www.savethechildren.org/atf/cf/%7B9def2ebe-10ae-432c-9bd0-df91d2eba74a%7D/TOO_YOUNG_TO_WED_REPORT_0714.PDF

- Governments and NGOs to set up quality services in refugee camps and areas, which offer both physical and psychological support to survivors of gender-based violence.

- Governments and NGOs to effectively address domestic violence in refugee camps and areas, and to see it as a societal problem, not a private one.

- Governments and NGOs to create spaces for all refugees to be empowered and challenge cultural attitudes and practices.